

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
EB-08 OMB-01 TRSE-00 AID-05 SNM-05 DEAE-00 CTME-00
COME-00 FRB-03 XMB-02 OPIC-03 LAB-04 SIL-01 MCT-01
HA-05 /106 W

-----061729 081620Z /64

P R 081515Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7370
INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS
USSOUTHCOM
AMCONSUL BARRANQUILLA
AMCONSUL CALI
AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PINS, PEPR, ECON, CO
SUBJ: POLITICAL SUMMARIES: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. IMPLIED CHARGES OF OFFICIAL CORRUPTION BY A
U.S. TELEVISION PROGRAM PROVOKED PROTESTS AND DENIALS FROM
COLOMBIAN LEADERS AND THE LOCAL PRESS. CANDIDATES FOR THE
JUNE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION BEGAN USING THEIR GOVERNMENT-
ALLOTTED TIME ON NATIONAL TELEVISION. THE SPECIAL SESSION
OF CONGRESS GRANTED THE PRESIDENT AUTHORITY TO MAKE ADMIN-
ISTRATIVE REFORMS. THIS MONTH'S INFLATION FIGURES INDICATE
A PROBABLE CONTINUANCE OF PRESENT MONETARY CONTROLS. A
GENERALLY QUIET WEEK, BY COLOMBIAN STANDARDS, WAS MARRED BY
A CONTINUATION OF KIDNAPPINGS. END SUMMARY.

2. CBS TELEVISION'S CORRUPTION CHARGES PROMPT COLOMBIAN
PROTESTS.

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THE APRIL 2 CBS "SIXTY MINUTES" BROADCAST, WHICH CLAIMED
TO BE BASED ON CLASSIFIED USG REPORTS, IMPLIED INVOLVEMENT
BY HIGH GOC OFFICIALS IN NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING, PROVOKING
A RASH OF PROTESTS AND DENIALS FROM COLOMBIAN LEADERS AND
THE LOCAL PRESS (BOGOTA 3214). LIBERAL PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE
TURBAY AND DEFENSE MINISTER VARON, NAMED IN THE PROGRAM
ALONG WITH LABOR MINISTER MONTOYA, MADE PUBLIC THEIR EXCHANGE

OF LETTERS ON THE SUBJECT WITH THE AMBASSADOR. THEY WERE JOINED IN THEIR PROTESTS BY CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS AND THE MAJOR DAILIES, ALL OF WHOM DECRIED THE CBS CHARGES AS AN INSULT TO THE NATIONAL HONOR. CONSERVATIVE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE BETANCUR DEFENDED HIS OPPONENT AND CALLED FOR AN INVESTIGATION OF THE MATTER, WHILE ECHOING VARON IN QUESTIONING THE INTEGRITY OF USG SOURCES. COMMENT: TURBAY BELIEVES HE HAS EMERGED WELL FROM THE INCIDENT, HAVING RECEIVED WIDESPREAD SUPPORT AND HAVING DEALT A BLOW TO LOCAL RUMORS OF HIS CONNECTION TO DRUG TRAFFICKERS. BETANCUR CLEVERLY BACKED TURBAY AGAINST FOREIGN CHARGES WHILE PROLONGING INTEREST IN THEM BY CALLING FOR AN INVESTIGATION WHICH PROBABLY NEVER WILL TAKE PLACE. LOCAL COVERAGE OF THE EPISODE, WHILE DECIDEDLY NEGATIVE, WAS NOT BITTER AND FOCUSED ON CBS' ALLEGED IRRESPONSIBILITY IN DISTORTING THE FACTS. MEDIA ATTENTION TO THE MATTER IS BEGINNING TO DIMINISH, BUT WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE FOR A WHILE LONGER.

3. PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN GOES ON TV. PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES BEGAN TO USE THEIR GOVERNMENT-ALLOTTED TIME ON TV - 2 HOURS EACH IN HALF-HOUR SEGMENTS. LEADING-OFF WAS JAIME PIEDRAHITA, EX-ANAPO LEADER, NOW THE CANDIDATE OF THE LEFTIST PEOPLE'S UNITY FRONT (FUP), WHO IMPASSIVELY READ A STATEMENT ATTACKING ALL OF THE OTHER CANDIDATES, AND IN PARTICULAR HIS MAJOR LEFTIST RIVAL PERNIA, OF THE UNITED NATIONAL OPPOSITION (UNO), ALSO AN EX-ANAPISTA. IN REFRESHING CONTRAST, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE BELISARIO BETANCUR APPEARED THE FOLLOWING NIGHT TO GOOD ADVANTAGE, FIELDING APPARENTLY PROBING SPONTANEOUS QUESTIONS FROM TWO REPORTERS IN A WARM, ARTICULATE AND DECISIVE MANNER. LIBERAL CANDIDATE TURBAY ALSO PRESSED AHEAD WITH HIS CAMPAIGN, SWINGING THROUGH THE NORTH COAST TO CONSOLIDATE HIS HEAVY SUPPORT THERE AND INSTALLING HIS CAMPAIGN LEADERSHIP IN BOGOTA. WHILE MOST OF NOW RETIRED EX-PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS' FORMER SUPPORTERS HAVE BOARDED THE TURBAY BANDWAGON, MUCH OF THE FORMER LLERAS LEADERSHIP IN BOGOTA HAS NOT YET DONE SO AND HAS BROKEN UP INTO TWO OR MORE FACTIONS, BITTERLY SQUABBLING OVER LLERAS' POLITICAL LEGACY AND MANEUVERING FOR LOCAL POLITICAL ADVANTAGE. COMMENT: FUP CANDIDATE PIEDRAHITA, WHOSE PRINCIPAL BACKERS ARE THE MAOIST MOIR, FURTHER LESSENED THE CHANCES OF LEFTIST UNITY BY HIS ATTACKS ON PERNIA AND ON THE MOSCOW-LINE COLOMBIAN COMMUNIST PARTY, THE BACKBONE OF PERNIA'S SUPPORT. HIS CHARGES THAT THE PRESENT HEAD OF ANAPO, MARIA EUGENIA ROJAS, THE DAUGHTER OF THE MOVEMENT'S FOUNDER, GENERAL ROJAS, HAD BETRAYED HER FATHER'S MEMORY AND THE MOVEMENT'S INTEGRITY BY ALLYING IT WITH HIS OLD CONSERVATIVE ENEMIES WERE TELLING AND SHOULD FURTHER DIMINISH THE EXPECTEDLY SMALL SUPPORT OF TRADITIONAL ANAPO SUPPORTERS FOR BETANCUR.

BETANCUR'S RELAXED GIVE AND TAKE WITH THE JOURNALISTS WAS, IN FACT, WELL PREPARED, THE REPORTERS SERVING UP TO THE CANDIDATE GOOD QUESTIONS WHICH HAD BEEN AGREED UPON IN ADVANCE. BETANCUR SHOWED THAT HE KNOWS HOW TO MAKE EXCELLENT USE OF THE TELEVISION MEDIUM.

4. CONGRESS HOLDS FLASH SESSION.

THE SPECIAL THREE-DAY SESSION OF CONGRESS CALLED TO INCREASE GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE SALARIES MET FOR 1 1/2 HOURS AND WENT HOME, HAVING AUTHORIZED PRESIDENT LOPEZ DECREE POWERS TO GRANT A RAISE. THE CHAMBER'S ACCUSATIONS COMMITTEE DECIDED NOT TO REVIEW CHARGES OF CORRUPTION AGAINST THE PUBLIC WORKS MINISTER, LEAVING THAT ISSUE FOR THE NEW CONGRESS CONVENING IN JULY. CHAMBER PRESIDENT AND SENATOR-ELECT SANTOFIMIO CONTINUED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INCARCERATED AND AWAITING TRIAL - REPORTEDLY IN PLUSH STYLE - FOLLOWING A COURT RULING THAT HIS PARLIAMENTARY IMMUNITY HAD NOT BEEN VALIDATED BY THIS SESSION. THE SESSION DID NOTHING TO REDEEM THE PARLOUS CONDITION OF CONGRESSIONAL PRESTIGE.

5. INFLATION RATE INCREASES IN MARCH.

THE CONSUMER PRICE INDEX FOR WORKERS INCREASED BY 3.2 PERCENT IN MARCH, A SHARP INCREASE FROM THE PREVIOUS EIGHT MONTHS INFLATION FIGURES, BUT REPRESENTED A SEASONALLY ADJUSTED ANNUAL RATE OF ONLY 22 PERCENT. THE FIRST QUARTER'S INFLATION OF 5.6 PERCENT SEASONALLY ADJUSTS TO A 15 PERCENT ANNUAL RATE. THE MONEY SUPPLY DECREASED IN THE FIRST QUARTER BY .8 PERCENT, A SEASONALLY ADJUSTED ANNUAL INCREASE OF ABOUT 15 PERCENT, SO THAT PRICE MOVEMENTS ARE STILL CONSISTENT WITH INFLATION FOR THE YEAR OF AROUND 20 PERCENT. THE MARCH PRICE BEHAVIOR, HOWEVER, MEANS THAT THE MONETARY CONTROLS WILL PROBABLY REMAIN IN PLACE FOR THE TIME BEING, AND THAT THE ANNUAL RATE OF PESO DEVALUATION WILL CONTINUE AT AROUND 5 PERCENT. THESE POLICIES SLOW ECONOMIC EXPANSION AND MINOR EXPORT GROWTH.

6. ANOTHER KIDNAPPING.

ANOTHER KIDNAPPING MAINTAINED CONCERN OVER SECURITY IN BOGOTA. THE VICTIM WAS THE ELEVEN-YEAR OLD SON OF A WEALTHY FRENCH RESIDENT. THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT THIS IS OTHER THAN A CRIMINAL ACTION FOR RANSOM, BUT COMING AFTER LAST WEEK'S ABDUCTION OF A PROMINENT BOGOTA BUSINESSMAN, IT IS UNSETTLING TO PUBLIC OPINION. IN BARRANQUILLA, A PROMINENT PHYSICIAN REPORTEDLY WAS WOUNDED AFTER SUCCESSFULLY STRUGGLING TO FREE HIMSELF FROM WOULD-BE ABDUCTORS. ASENCIO

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL SUMMARIES, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 08 apr 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BOGOTA03306
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780152-0774
Format: TEL
From: BOGOTA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780478/aaaacogv.tel
Line Count: 166
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 4fb5aab3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3031269
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: POLITICAL SUMMARIES: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA
TAGS: PINT, PINS, PEPR, ECON, CO
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/4fb5aab3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014